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Simon Robertson
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Dear Mr Robertson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Aylestone School

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that teachers and leaders place greater emphasis on pupils' learning as opposed to teachers' teaching
- ensure that teachers plan tasks for pupils, especially the most able pupils, that stretch their thinking and deepen their knowledge
- disseminate the effective work in careers education that exists in key stage 4 and introduce it in key stage 3 so that all pupils are well-prepared for their next steps.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, and members of the governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with a national leader in education (NLE) and a local authority colleague. Inspectors met with a group of pastoral and academic middle leaders. The school's improvement and self-evaluation documents were evaluated. The lead inspector and senior leaders visited English, mathematics, science, geography, music and languages classes during learning walks and looked at pupils' books, work and sought pupils' views in discussions. The lead inspector observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, lesson change-over times and breaktime and spoke to many of them about their school.

Context

Since the time of the last inspection, the school has faced some staffing turbulence. A notable number of new staff have joined and others have left the school. There are currently vacancies in mathematics and science. Leadership has remained stable.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have introduced a sense of purpose and urgency to the school. You have changed the school's ethos and worked hard to rebuild the school's reputation within the local community. As a result, improvements are evident and many parents now choose this school again for their children. You know the school well, accurately evaluate its effectiveness and are focused on improving the standard of education for your pupils. Other senior leaders are also making a positive contribution to the new direction. Staff, including middle leaders, are responding very well to the changes and are keen to continue to improve their practice. Improvements are now clearly evident, for example in pupils' behaviour, attendance and in the quality of teaching and learning.

You seek actively and engage effectively with external support to improve the school further. For example, an NLE has worked closely and effectively with you and your senior colleagues to provide support, challenge and mentorship. You have secured additional funding to be able to continue improvement work within certain subject areas and focus more closely on classroom practices. Governors provide additional support and challenge to you and your colleagues. They know the school well and have a clear view of what works well and what needs to improve further.

You and your leaders were proactive in addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Leaders now monitor regularly the effectiveness of teaching and learning. You put effective training for staff in place that is now more bespoke to their individual needs. Teachers speak highly of the support and training they receive to further their practice. However, too often there remains a focus on what the

teacher is doing rather than how well pupils are learning. This causes some leaders, including middle leaders, to miss instances where pupils are not learning as well as they should be, especially the most able pupils.

Teachers have strong relationships with pupils and know them well. They model answers clearly and ensure that pupils know what they need to do to succeed. Pupils value this information and say that they feel well supported in lessons. Some teachers do not consistently use the information they have about their pupils' prior learning to plan tasks that stretch their thinking and deepen their learning. When this happens, pupils are given tasks that are more of the same rather than providing additional challenge to them. As a result, some pupils, especially the most able pupils, are not achieving as well as they could.

Middle leaders form a dedicated group of professionals who now play an active part in driving improvements. They monitor the quality of provision in their faculties and address issues that they identify. Middle leaders are complimentary about the support you and other senior leaders provide. They say that they now feel empowered, supported and listened to by senior leaders and their work is valued. Middle leaders 'work together for a common goal' and play a pivotal role in school development. They share best practice with each other and colleagues from other schools. This helps them to continue to raise standards in their subject areas.

Attendance has improved notably and incidents in which pupils miss long periods of school have declined sharply. This is further testimony to improved provision at the school. Pupils now value their education and enjoy learning. Consequently, they attend regularly. You and your colleagues have built effective relationships with parents and, as a result, they now understand the value of regular attendance. Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around school is calm and orderly. Pupils are courteous, polite, friendly and respectful to each other, adults and visitors. Consequently, fixed-term exclusions have fallen and far fewer pupils spend time in the school's isolation unit.

Pupils in key stage 4 speak highly of the advice they receive to prepare them for their next steps. Pupils benefit from visits to universities and outside speakers to inform them about apprenticeships, for example. Pupils receive visits from external speakers and/or potential employers. As a result, pupils in key stage 4 are well placed to make informed choices about their future careers. This effective work has not yet been cascaded into key stage 3. Here pupils receive advice about their option choices but not much else. As a result, pupils are not as well informed as they should be about future career pathways and what options are available to them.

External support

You have engaged effectively with support provided by an NLE and colleagues from other schools, for example to secure reviews of the school's use of the pupil premium funding and the quality of safeguarding at your school. These reviews have

highlighted some areas for improvement. You and your colleagues have acted on many of the suggestions made and the consequent improvements are evident. A clear strength is your willingness to engage with others in order continuously to improve your practice and the life chances of the young people at your school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bianka Zemke
Her Majesty's Inspector